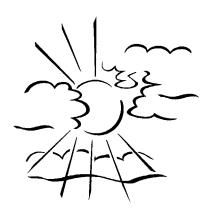
Department of Human Services

Articles in Today's Clips Monday, January 23, 2006

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Prepared by the DHS Office of Communications (517) 373-7394



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Granholm backs \$1B health plan for poor Governor wants to cut in half the number of uninsured; Republicans are skeptical.

Mark Hornbeck and Charlie Cain / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Gov. Jennifer Granholm will propose in her State of the State address Wednesday a \$1 billion plan to cut in half the number of Michiganians without health insurance. Under her so-called "Michigan Health First Partnership," some 500,000 low-income residents --

under her so-called "Michigan Health First Partnership," some 500,000 low-income residents most of them working adults -- would get state-issued health care cards.

Those earning less than the federal poverty level, which is \$18,850 for a family of four, would have no co-pays or deductibles. The amount recipients would have to contribute would rise along with their income. The cut-off would be double the poverty level, or \$38,700 for a family of four.

Michigan would kick in about \$400 million, which administration officials said the state is already paying through various programs for the uninsured, and the federal government would be expected to ante up \$500 million to \$600 million. The program would require no new taxes, Granholm aides said. Under the most optimistic scenario, the proposal is many months from being put in place.

Prospects for approval from the Republican-controlled Legislature in an election year are uncertain. Administration officials weren't even sure if legislative action would be required. "If someone can come up with a proposal so people can lead a better life, we'd obviously be interested in studying the proposal," said Ari Adler, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. Adler said Republicans in the Legislature are skeptical the money can be found to operate the program in the current budget.

The ambitious proposal is a centerpiece of the governor's fourth State of the State Address, to be delivered at 7 p.m. Wednesday to the Legislature and broadcast live over public television stations. Insiders have said the message will have few new proposals because the economically challenged state continues to be strapped for cash. The governor will present her budget for the upcoming fiscal year on Feb. 9.

"It's a great goal; we're spending this money already and I don't think it will be hard to get our arms around it," said Janet Olszewski, director of the state Department of Community Health. Granholm also will call for stepping up efforts to improve healthy lifestyles through education programs at schools, offices and churches. Finally, she will advocate setting up the nation's first statewide electronic network to consolidate health care information so it can be easily shared by doctors, hospitals and other health care providers.

The governor's health insurance expansion initiative will cover only half of the state's 1 million uninsured, Olszewski said, because that's all the state can afford now. Cards would be issued to the first eligible 500,000 who apply, she said.

"We would love to get all the way but we believe at this point we have identified a plan to get us halfway," Olszewski said.

Olszewski said the governor has already met with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Director Mike Leavitt about the program and she characterized his response as "enthusiastic." She said the state and federal governments are still working out details.

The state also is looking at how to prevent businesses already offering health care from dropping that benefit to take advantage of the new state plan, she said.

"We're going to be designing this very carefully," Olszewski said.

Kevin Kelly, executive director of the Michigan State Medical Society, called the plan "very aggressive. But I think we ought to be able to tackle it.

"We certainly are looking at some kind of expanded coverage for the uninsured in this state, whose numbers are growing every year."

Brian Peters, senior vice president of the Michigan Health and Hospital Association, said the proposal "is a good start.

"Health care providers pick up \$1 billion a year in costs for health care for the uninsured. But aside from the financial hit on hospitals, it's a poor approach not to cover people. Because instead of seeking primary care, they wait until their condition worsens and then they have to seek more expensive care."

The plan would be separate from the state Medicaid program, which provides health care coverage for 1.5 million residents, including children, disabled and senior citizens.

Pressed for details on how the state will round up \$400 million to sock into the program, Olszewski said: "We're working on that right now."

Liz Boyd, the governor's press secretary, said by redirecting dollars, the state should be able to leverage money from the federal government to help pay for the program.

"This is going to take time to put together. It will take an awful lot of work to put this in place," Boyd said.

Olszewski stressed that Granholm's plan also includes healthy lifestyle promotion. She noted that most health care money goes to the treatment of chronic diseases, which lifestyle changes can prevent or minimize.

"We need to be more physically active, we need to eat better and we need to not smoke," she said

Granholm sees the plan as a key element in her overall economic development strategy: A state with better health care coverage -- and better health -- would be viewed as a better place to live and do business.

Olszewski said she was particularly concerned by the "childhood obesity epidemic in Michigan" and said schools are already beginning to address the problem by changing lunch menus, restocking vending machines and offering more physical education.

Businesses can also play a role by having bike and walking paths nearby so employees can exercise during breaks.

"Focusing on healthy lifestyles will go a long way to reducing health care costs and to attracting new business to this state," said Peters at the Michigan Health and Hospital Association.

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healthcare incentives

Monday, January 23, 2006

By Chris Meehan cmeehan@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8412

Republican State Rep. Tom George on Sunday hailed the announcement by Gov. Jennifer Granholm that she will propose in her State of the State address this week a \$1 billion plan to cut in half the number of state residents without health insurance.

But the Kalamazoo-area legislator says the governor is not going far enough in the program she calls ``Michigan Health First Partnership."

George was to unveil in a press conference this morning his own plan to cut the cost of health care in Michigan.

"It is very interesting that she also identifies health care as such a key element of our state's economic problems," said George, who often encounters health-care-coverage issues in his work as an anesthesiologist.

"We (Republicans) have drawn the same conclusion, but we have different approaches in fixing it," George said.

The governor proposes issuing state health-care cards to many of the 500,000 Michigan residents without health insurance.

Funding would come from the federal government as well as from money the state already pays through various programs, the Detroit News reported Sunday.

Granholm also proposes trying to cut health-care costs by teaching people how to make better lifestyle choices. The education would be provided through schools, churches and offices. Making sure everyone has health coverage is a worthy goal, but it misses the mark, George said. Similarly, health education is fine, but current efforts to cut down on smoking and overeating and to boost people's level and frequency of exercise aren't effective.

"You need pocket-book incentives to make this work." George said. "You need pocket-book incentives to make this work."

STATE CONTINUING E.P.I.C. TO EASE THROUGH MEDICARE CHANGES

State officials had hoped to discontinue its elder prescription insurance program, which helped low income senior citizens pay the costs of their prescription medications, on December 31 just ahead of the start of the new federal Medicare Part D prescription coverage. But officials said Friday because of problems that have accompanied the start of the Medicare program, they will continue operating the EPIC program until March 31.

Across the nation, states have had to step in to assist in situations where the elderly – particularly those eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid – have had trouble getting prescription coverage because they were not yet enrolled in a plan or the plan did not show them enrolled.

An official with the Michigan Pharmacists Association said there have been cases where pharmacists have spent as much as five hours on hold on the telephone trying to talk to someone with a Medicare plan to check if a customer is covered.

Friday, the National Governors Association notified the states that health insurance companies have pledged to reimburse the states for their temporary coverage of Medicare Part D costs.

All Medicare recipients are supposed to sign up for a plan by May, but those individuals also eligible for Medicaid were required to be in a plan by January 1.

T.J. Bucholz said the state had sent a number of letters to EPIC-eligible individuals that they needed to enroll in a plan, and is still telling those on the EPIC system that they need to enroll.

But rather than end the plan on December 31, the state decided it needed to continue it a few months longer to ensure no person goes without prescription coverage.

Mr. Bucholz said claims against the program are running at one-third their previous rate, indicating most recipients have gone onto other Medicare Part D plans.

The EPIC program was eligible to the elderly who had incomes of up to 150 percent of the poverty rate, and allowed them to qualify for prescriptions on the same basis as Medicaid-eligible recipients.

GOP looks for remedy to prescription drug bill chaos Support for Medicare law erodes; Democrats propose legislation to address start-up problems

Janet Hook / Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON -- Only months ago, congressional Republicans thought the new Medicare prescription drug benefit would help them make political inroads among traditionally Democratic senior citizens. Instead, they are facing a potentially damaging backlash among members of that crucial voting bloc, their families and even conservative activists dismayed over the program's bungled launch.

Georgia Rep. Jack Kingston, a member of the GOP leadership, has held at least 10 workshops to help his elderly constituents navigate the complex drug plan, and he implored his Republican colleagues to do likewise.

"There's a tremendous opportunity for members of Congress to go out there and be the white knights -- to listen, answer questions and get in the weeds with their constituents," he said. "But for members who feel they don't want to bother, they are going to hear from those voters in November."

"It's no windfall politically," said Rep. Philip Gingrey, R-Ga., a physician who voted for the program. "It could hurt us, but sometimes doing the right thing does hurt."

Some Republicans think the problem will blow over once the inevitable kinks are worked out. But recent opinion polls cast doubt on such optimism. They suggest that, even among Republicans, support for the program has eroded.

Democrats on Thursday stepped up their criticism of the program, which they said benefits big drug and insurance companies at the expense of the elderly. They also called for congressional action on the many start-up problems. Hundreds of thousands of seniors -- mostly low-income -- have had trouble getting their medicines, and many have been overcharged. More than 20 states have jumped in with emergency assistance.

"This Medicare bill is the biggest government fiasco in recent memory," said Sen. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

Republicans also are facing criticism from conservative activists who opposed the program's creation in the first place. They see it as an emblem of how the GOP -- after more than a decade in power -- has betrayed conservatives' commitment to small government.

"The fallout is likely to be huge," said an aide to a prominent conservative member of Congress who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak for his boss. "It's likely to anger seniors, while reminding the conservative base about the big-government approach that Republicans took to health care."

Thus far, polls show no stampede of elderly voters to the GOP. And according to polling by the Pew Research Center on People and the Press, the percentage of conservative Republican voters who approved of the drug plan dropped from 66 percent in December 2003 to 54 percent in December 2005; approval by moderate Republicans dropped even more over those two years, from 74 percent to 56 percent.

"It hasn't been the big political plus they hoped for. The question is whether it will be a minus," said Drew E. Altman, president of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. "That is what is at stake in this early implementation period, which is not going so well so far."

Congress voted in 2003 to expand Medicare to cover prescription drug costs, but delayed its implementation until Jan. 1, 2006 to allow time to set up the complex program. Most Medicare recipients were given until May 15 to sign up for the program, which is voluntary. But several million Medicare recipients who also qualify for Medicaid, which serves the poor, were automatically moved into the new program on Jan. 1. The number of people involved in that one-day transition has contributed to many of the start-up problems.

Many senior citizens have been overwhelmed by the complexity of the program. Medicare's information lines are jammed. Because of data errors, pharmacists have been unable to determine in many cases whether low-income beneficiaries were even covered. And the poorest beneficiaries have faced the biggest problems.

Democrats sense a political opportunity, especially at a time when the GOP is reeling from ethics scandals, internal squabbling and a leadership shake-up in the House.

Rep. Rahm Emanuel, D-Ill., chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, predicts that complaints about the program will intensify as seniors bump up against a limitation on benefits known as the "doughnut hole" -- a big gap in coverage of drug expenses.

"If you think they are mad now, you ain't seen nothing yet," Emanuel said.

Senate Democrats on Thursday proposed legislation to address the start-up problems.

One bill would provide federal reimbursement to the states that are stepping in with emergency funding for low-income seniors. The Bush administration has said states must look to the private insurance companies for reimbursement, although Washington would support such recovery efforts. A second bill proposes longer-term fixes, including staffing sign-up locations with trained Medicare employees and improving the agency's telephone hotline.

The bill to compensate states drew two Republican cosponsors, senators Olympia J. Snowe of Maine and Norm Coleman of Minnesota. But other Republicans have taken a wait-and-see attitude, arguing that the federal agency that runs Medicare should try to solve the problems administratively before Congress acts

"It's too early to commit to any legislative options," said Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles E. Grassley, R-Iowa. Still, he acknowledged the seriousness of the problems besetting the program.

"It's unacceptable that some of the poorest, sickest people are having the most trouble, and it's not what Congress intended," Grassley said.

Republicans have a huge stake in the program's success because it is one of the biggest domestic accomplishments of the Bush presidency -- one they hoped would make it harder for Democrats to mount their traditional attack on Republicans as hostile to the elderly.

The big test of the program may not come till later in the year, after people see what is and is not covered.

"I don't know that the rocky start is as important as what people see at the end of the day," said Tony Fabrizio, a GOP pollster. "The real rubber meets the road when they see what their expectations were versus what they actually get."

Medicare Woes Take High Toll on Mentally Ill

By <u>ROBERT PEAR</u>
The New York Times

Published: January 21, 2006

HILLIARD, Fla., Jan. 16 - On the seventh day of the new Medicare drug benefit, Stephen Starnes began hearing voices again, ominous voices, and he started to beg for the medications he had been taking for 10 years. But his pharmacy could not get approval from his Medicare drug plan, so Mr. Starnes was admitted to a hospital here for treatment of paranoid schizophrenia. Mr. Starnes, 49, lives in Dayspring Village, a former motel that is licensed by the State of Florida as an assisted living center for people with mental illness. When he gets his medications, he is stable.

"Without them," he said, "I get aggravated at myself, I have terrible pain in my gut, I feel as if I am freezing one moment and burning up the next moment. I go haywire, and I want to hurt myself."

Mix-ups in the first weeks of the Medicare drug benefit have vexed many beneficiaries and pharmacists. Dr. Steven S. Sharfstein, president of the American Psychiatric Association, said the transition from Medicaid to Medicare had had a particularly severe impact on low-income patients with serious, persistent mental illnesses.

"Relapse, rehospitalization and disruption of essential treatment are some of the consequences," Dr. Sharfstein said.

Dr. Jacqueline M. Feldman, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, said that two of her patients with schizophrenia had gone to a hospital emergency room because they could not get their medications. Dr. Feldman, who is also the director of a community mental health center, said "relapse is becoming more frequent" among her low-income Medicare patients.

Emma L. Hayes, director of emergency services at Ten Broeck Hospital, a psychiatric center in Jacksonville, said, "We have seen some increase in admissions, and anticipate a lot more," as people wrestle with the new drug benefit.

Medicare's free-standing prescription drug plans are not responsible for the costs of hospital care or doctors' services. "They have no business incentive to worry about those costs," said Dr. Joseph J. Parks, medical director of the Missouri Department of Mental Health, who reported that many of his Medicare patients had been unable to get medicines or had experienced delays. At least 24 states have taken emergency action to pay for prescription drugs if people cannot obtain them by using the new Medicare drug benefit. Florida is not among those states. In an interview, Alan M. Levine, secretary of the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration, said: "We've set up a phone line and an e-mail address for pharmacists. We try to solve these problems on a case-by-case basis. We have stepped in to get drug plans to pay for prescriptions, so people don't leave the pharmacy without their medications."

Federal officials said they were moving aggressively to fix problems with the drug benefit. About 250 federal employees have been enlisted as caseworkers to help individual patients. The

government has told insurers to provide a temporary supply - typically 30 days - of any prescription that a person was previously taking. And Medicare has sent data files to insurers, supposedly listing all low-income people entitled to extra help with premiums and co-payments. But in many cases, pharmacists say, they still cannot get the information needed to submit claims, to verify eligibility or to calculate the correct co-payments for low-income people. And often, they say, they must wait for hours when they try to reach insurers by telephone.

S. Kimberly Belshé, secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency, said the actions taken by the federal government "have not been sufficient to address the problems that California residents continue to experience."

At Dayspring Village, in the northeast corner of Florida near Jacksonville, the 80 residents depend heavily on medications. They line up for their medicines three times a day. Members of the staff, standing at a counter, dispense the pills through a window that looks like the ticket booth at a movie theater.

Most of the residents are on Medicare, because they have disabilities, and Medicaid, because they have low incomes. Before Jan. 1, the state's Medicaid program covered their drugs at no charge. Since then, the residents have been covered by a private insurance company under contract to Medicare.

For the first time, residents of Dayspring Village found this month that they were being charged co-payments for their drugs, typically \$3 for each prescription. The residents take an average of eight or nine drugs, so the co-payments can take a large share of their cash allowance, which is \$54 a month.

Even after the insurer agreed to relax "prior authorization" requirements for a month, it was charging high co-payments for some drugs - \$52 apiece for Abilify, an anti-psychotic medicine, and Depakote, a mood stabilizer used in treating <u>bipolar disorder</u>.

The patients take antipsychotic drugs for schizophrenia; more drugs to treat side effects of those drugs, like tremors and <u>insomnia</u>; and still other drugs to treat chronic conditions like <u>diabetes</u> and high blood pressure.

"If I didn't have any of those medications, I would probably be institutionalized for the rest of my life," said Deborah Ann Katz, a 36-year-old Medicare beneficiary at Dayspring. "I'd be hallucinating, hearing voices."

Michael D. Ranne, president of the Jacksonville chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, said the use of powerful psychiatric medications "virtually emptied out state mental hospitals" in the 1970's and early 80's. Ms. Katz said she had been "in and out of hospitals" since she was 13.

Sponsors of the 2003 Medicare law wanted to drive down costs by creating a competitive market for drug insurance. They focused on older Americans, not the disabled. They assumed that beneficiaries would sort through various drug plans to find the one that best met their needs. But that assumption appears unrealistic for people at Dayspring Village.

Heidi L. Fretheim, a case manager for Dayspring residents, said: "If I take them shopping at Wal-Mart, the experience is overwhelming for them. They get nervous. They think the clerks are plotting against them, or out to hurt them."

Residents of Dayspring Village see worms in their food. Some neglect personal hygiene because they hear voices in the shower. When nurses draw blood, some patients want the laboratory to return it so the blood can be put back in their veins.

Under the 2003 Medicare law, low-income people entitled to both Medicare and Medicaid are exempted from all co-payments if they live in a nursing home. But the exemption does not apply to people in assisted living centers like Dayspring Village.

Douglas D. Adkins, executive director of Dayspring Village, said: "Some of the pharmacists have been saying, 'No pills unless we get a co-payment.' Well, how are these people going to get the money for a co-payment? They don't have it."

Eunice Medina, a policy analyst at the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, said the state was trying to "find a solution" for people in assisted living centers.

"We are all aware that the next couple of months will be difficult for these clients, and that the possibility of a transition to a nursing home is their only option if prescriptions are not covered in assisted living facilities," Ms. Medina said in a memorandum to local social service agencies. Luis E. Collazo, administrator of Palm Breeze, an assisted living center for the mentally ill in Hialeah, Fla., said many of his residents were forgoing their medications on account of the new co-payments.

"Because of their mental illness," Mr. Collazo said, "they don't have the insight to realize the consequences of not taking their medications. Without their medicines, they will definitely go into the hospital."

The Eye of a Medicare Hurricane

Policy Group Sorts Out Complexities of New Drug Program

By Amy GoldsteinWashington Post Staff Writer

Monday, January 23, 2006; Page A13

If a health plan pays a pharmacy for medicine it dispensed to an elderly patient, before realizing that the person already had switched to a different health plan, how do the insurance companies settle up? If a pharmacy run by a federally funded health clinic wants to cover some costs that its Medicare patients are supposed to pay on their own, is that legal? And how much of a refund should patients get if they have chipped in to cover part of the price of their medicine before the government determined they are so poor that they should not have had to pay in the first place? Such brainteasers would have been unimaginable through most of the four decades that Medicare has provided health insurance to the nation's elderly. But since Jan. 1, when the program's new drug benefit began, such questions surface routinely. Often as not, they land on Tracey McCutcheon's desk.

As acting deputy director of the Medicare Drug Policy Group at the Center for Medicare and Medicare Services (CMS), McCutcheon is deep in the weeds of the largest, most complex and --judging from its first three weeks -- messiest expansion of the program in its history. From a first-floor office in an immense government building in a western suburb of Baltimore, she works 12-hour days, taking conference calls, combing through statutory language and rethinking the fine print of 60 pages of federal regulations she helped to write.

"Lots of moving parts," is the way she describes her job, with understatement.

McCutcheon, 52, is not a longtime federal bureaucrat. She had worked for several of the Washington area's major hospital systems and health plans, most recently for a disease management offshoot of Inova Health System. When she began thinking about what she wanted to do next, she realized, "I may have sort of a regulatory bent" -- drawn, as she was, to solving problems, making systems work and complying with government rules.

She began to commute from her home in Silver Spring to a job as "health insurance specialist" at CMS headquarters in February 2003. She remembers that, in the first days, her boss remarked that Congress was starting to look serious about prescription drug legislation it had been debating for years. The bill passed late that year.

Today, McCutcheon is a GS-15 with a staff of about 50, now that she has been promoted to acting deputy of a group within the agency that sets policy for health plans. Her speech and writing are sprinkled with obscure abbreviations: TrOOP (true out-of-pocket cost, or the sum Medicare patients must pay in deductibles and co-pays before the drug coverage begins) and LIS (low-income subsidy for poor older people).

Shortly before the benefit took effect, McCutcheon found herself debating what the word "person" means. The context was an aspect of the Medicare law that says out-of-pocket costs are to be paid by the beneficiary or other person on their behalf. The challenge was to find a way to allow charitable organizations to chip in.

Currently, she and her staff are rethinking a rule that allows health plans to "co-brand," when they place on the prescription drug card they give patients the name of a second company, such

as a drug store. The worry is that patients might mistakenly believe they can fill prescriptions only at the store named on the card.

Such matters are arcane, but they also have broad implications for whether insurers remain in the program, whether pharmacists are willing to fill prescriptions and -- most of all -- whether the nation's older patients come to believe the federal insurance for medicine is worthwhile. As complaints and confusion about the drug benefit have spread around the country this month, McCutcheon said, "some of the specific issues that come up have been surprising." Still, she said, "you never bring up a huge program and have everything perfect."

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STATE OF THE STATE: Medicaid

January 23, 2006

Detroit Free Press

What the governor inherited: Medicaid was an expanding burden, consuming about a fourth of state's general fund budget.

What she said/did in 2003: She said medical care for elderly and poor people should be a top priority.

What has happened since: Medicaid increased by \$570 million, to \$2.8 billion. The state has done little to address one of the fastest-growing demands: long-term care for elderly people in nursing homes. Money from a 2004 cigarette tax increase was largely earmarked for Medicaid. What she's saying now: She's angry about proposed federal Medicaid cuts to states.

What's likely to happen: Medicaid costs could jump \$400 million by 2007. Republicans are to propose requirements that Medicaid recipients quit smoking and eat healthier. No proposal from the governor.

Chris Christoff

Congress Looks to Toughen Welfare Laws

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Kevin McGuire estimates that 18,000 welfare recipients in Maryland have entered the work force during the past two years.

"If that's failing, I'm guilty," said McGuire, who oversees the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

But under proposed changes to the nation's welfare laws, McGuire and his employees will have a lot of work to do over the coming year, or Washington could withhold millions of dollars.

Congress is expected soon to approve legislation that requires states to place at least half of their welfare families in jobs or approved training programs.

Only 10 states meet that requirement, according to the latest statistics compiled by the federal government. Some state are not close: Maryland, 9.1 percent; Pennsylvania, 9.9 percent; and West Virginia, 14.2 percent.

Kansas leads with a work participation rate of 87.9 percent. The other nine states meeting the threshold are Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Montana, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

The data comes from the 2003 budget year, and some states, including Maryland, say their participation rates have improved since then.

The House is expected to consider the proposed changes on Feb. 1. The Senate has passed the legislation, largely along party lines. The overhaul of the temporary aid program for families was attached to a bill that would trim government spending by \$40 billion over five years.

Wade Horn, the Bush administration's point man on welfare issues, said he is confident that states will do better if told they must.

"There is really good evidence that when states put their mind to it, they can dramatically increase the work participation rate," said Horn, assistant secretary for families and children. Horn cites Georgia as his prime example. In two years, it went from 10 percent to a 55 percent work participation rate.

Beverly J. Walker, commissioner of the Georgia Department of Human Services, said the state is doing even better than Horn gave it credit for, with 65 percent of families participating in work as of October.

Some people fear that states will improve their rates primarily by kicking people out of the aid program when they miss a job interview or fail to show up for job training. Walker said Georgia used to rely on that approach, too.

"We were focused on getting caseload reduction any way we could," she said.

Work participation rates improved when Georgia moved away from its policy of "two strikes and you're out." Georgia now reduces a recipient's benefits gradually instead of dropping them abruptly.

As of November, only 366 of about 39,000 people were under some form of sanction under the temporary aid program in the state, she said.

The state also made better use of technology that allowed counties to track each client and to measure one country's performance against others, Walker said.

If Congress moves ahead, states would have until Oct. 1 to get their work participation requirements up to 50 percent. They also would have until Oct. 1, 2007, before penalties would kick in. Depending upon a state's performance, the federal Administration for Children and Families could reduce Washington's contribution and require the state to make up the difference. The latest statistics show the average work participation rate for all states and territories is 31 percent.

McGuire said he believes the participation rates can be a misleading measurement of effectiveness because they do not reflect some part-time work and can ignore other programs that recipients may participate in, such as substance abuse counseling.

Current law also says the states should be at 50 percent for work participation, but states get credit for the caseload reductions they made in the 1990s and early 2000s. As a result, most states can have participation rates in the teens and meet federal requirements.

A report by the Democratic staff on the House Ways and Means Committee said the new participation rates would pressure states to cut families off assistance.

"It will encourage them to deny assistance to needy families without regard to whether they have secured employment," the Democrats said.

The Democrats also cited a Congressional Budget Office estimate that states will have to spend an additional \$8.4 billion over the next five years to meet the new requirements. But the Democrats say the bill provides no extra money for job training and that an additional \$1 billion in child care doesn't keep pace with inflation, let alone pay for greater demand for child care. President Bush sought to increase the number of hours that participants had to work in order to get cash assistance and other benefits, such as child care or transportation. But that idea was cast aside during negotiations between the Senate and House.

Horn said the administration supports the welfare revisions proposed, even without the additional work hours.

He said the problem, as the administration viewed it, was not that too many people were working part time. Rather, too many people were not working at all.

"The big problem was that 56 percent of TANF recipients are not doing anything, not one hour over the past month in any activity, and to get them to be doing 20 or 30 hours of work a week would be a big achievement," Horn said.

On the Net:

Administration for Children and Families: http://www.acf.hhs.gov © 2006 The Associated Press.

Feds' welfare change may put states in vise Congress considers requiring at least half of aid recipients to be in job training programs.

Kevin Freking / Associated Press

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"If that's failing, I'm guilty," said McGuire, who oversees the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

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Welfare-to-work

The work participation rates in the 2003 budget year, the most recent year for which data is available, for families in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families:

Top states:

1. Kansas: 87.9 percent

Montana: 85.9
 Wyoming: 83
 Wisconsin: 67.2
 Hawaii: 65.8

Bottom states:

Maryland: 9.1 percent
 Pennsylvania: 9.9
 Georgia: 10.9
 Arizona: 13.4
 West Virginia: 14.2

15: Michigan: 25.3

2,500 ex-cons in school jobs They were convicted of sexual assaults, murder, other crimes; some face firing under new law.

Marisa Schultz / The Detroit News

Some 2,500 employees working in Michigan schools have been convicted of crimes, including sexual assault, homicide and kidnapping, according to a report of recent criminal background checks obtained by The Detroit News.

A name and date-of-birth search of about 200,000 current school employees through the Michigan State Police criminal history database revealed more than 4,600 criminal offenses, of which 2,200 were felonies.

More than 100 were sex crimes, which are immediate grounds for dismissal under tougher new school safety laws that went into effect Jan. 1.

"I'm shocked at the number of crimes they found," said a 53-year-old Ann Arbor father whose daughter had been sexually assaulted by her fourth-grade teacher. "It goes to show that they should have been doing that (background checks) with everyone they hire.

"You would think in light of the number of sex-related cases in the last few years involving teachers in the southeast Michigan school system, administrators would have taken it upon themselves to do a background check (on all employees)," said the father, whom The News is not naming to protect the identity of his daughter.

The background checks were prompted by new legislation, called the Student Safety Initiative, designed to protect kids from sex offenders in the classrooms. The state police cross-checked its database of known criminals with the Department of Education's school employee database. Now it's up to the school districts to determine whether anyone will be fired.

Prompted by a Detroit News report in April that revealed flaws in the system to protect children from sexually abusive educators, lawmakers passed the Student Safety Initiative that, among other provisions, required criminal background checks on all school employees, including janitors, cafeteria workers, coaches and paraprofessionals.

Until the laws were passed last fall, only new teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, school psychologists and bus drivers were required to have a background check.

Speaker of the House Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, who promoted the passage of the laws, was also shocked by the results and hopes it will prompt greater acceptance by teachers of the new background checks.

"You can't educate children if you can't provide a safe environment," DeRoche said.

DeRoche suspects most of the crimes were committed by non-teaching staff because a pre-

DeRoche suspects most of the crimes were committed by non-teaching staff because a previous background check of teachers revealed only a handful of them committed crimes.

The new laws have sparked some criticism because teachers and administrators who had already been fingerprinted upon being hired will have to provide the prints again because the state police had a policy of purging prints after checks.

The state is not providing funding for the checks, which cost about \$70 under a new digital system.

School districts say they can't afford to pay for the criminal history checks, and employees have protested paying again. Fingerprint checks are considered most accurate.

However, until all the prints are collected, the Department of Education provides school personnel information to the police for name checks.

Margaret Trimer-Hartley, director of communications for the Michigan Education Association, said she's waiting for the fingerprint data because name checks are not as "rock solid."

"We've been hesitant to make any comment until the data is absolutely positively as clean as it can get," she said.

As a result of the latest background checks, school districts will be alerted to any employees convicted of crimes. It will be up to their discretion on whether the employees will be terminated.

The background checks found 23 school employees had been convicted of homicide, 11 of child abuse, 10 of escaping jail or prison, 355 of drug felonies and 21 of armed robbery. Based on the safety laws passed last year, anyone who has committed a sex offense cannot be employed by a school. Also, anyone who has been convicted of any other felony cannot be employed unless the superintendent and the school board give written permission. However, those provisions won't be applicable until the final fingerprint checks are available. Schools are not required to have everyone fingerprinted until July 1, 2008. Frank Ruggirello, spokesman for Plymouth-Canton Community Schools, said if the district learns any of its employees are on the list, administrators will take immediate action. "Schools are all about keeping kids safe," he said. "I think we are constantly trying to make sure we have solid employees around our kids, and we will deal with the results. We'll do whatever

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we can to correct it."

BRIAN DICKERSON: Sex offender laws need to be flexible

January 23, 2006

BY BRIAN DICKERSON FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Here's a quiz for Michigan parents:

What do murder, kidnapping, narcotics trafficking, carjacking, wife beating, child abuse, drunken driving and animal torture all have in common?

The answer is that none of the aforementioned crimes disqualify a perpetrator from employment in your child's elementary school, so long as school administrators are willing to let bygones be bygones.

But fear not, parents: Daniel Fullmer won't be allowed to get within 1,000 feet of your kindergartner. Neither will 36,000 others listed on Michigan's sex offender registry, including hundreds who, like Fullmer, were convicted of nonviolent misdemeanors. Fullmer was a prison guard who admitted to having consensual sex with an inmate.

Under a state law that took effect Jan. 1, Michigan public schools are required to run criminal background checks on all their employees by July 1, 2008. Those whose records reveal a felony conviction will have to get their employer's approval to keep their jobs. But employees listed on the sex registry, even for nonviolent misdemeanors, face mandatory dismissal.

Running criminal background checks on prospective school employees before giving them access to young children is a no-brainer. Legislators decided to mandate such checks last year after the Detroit News reported that some educators convicted of serious sex crimes remained certified to teach.

It goes without saying that teachers and school employees with a history of criminal behavior deserve the closest scrutiny. It's also reasonable to require that ex-felons bear the burden of proving they represent no special threat.

But if lawmakers can imagine circumstances in which a school district might overlook an employee's convictions for aggravated assault, kidnapping or even murder, why can't they allow school boards comparable discretion in the case of employees charged with far less serious sexual offenses?

The new sanctions for school employees are predicated, like the sex offender registry itself, on the popular misconception that sexual offenders are especially predisposed to repeat their behavior. But research suggests that most sex offenders are at below-average risk for recidivism, particularly when they have undergone treatment. Nor do those prosecuted for youthful indiscretions with consensual partners pose the same threat as violent sexual predators. In 2002, U.S. District Judge Victoria Roberts held that Fullmer and others facing 25 years on Michigan's online sex offender registry were entitled to hearings in which they could rebut the state's presumption that they represented an ongoing risk. But appellate courts have since rejected Roberts' ruling, exempting sex offenders from the due process rights more violent criminals enjoy.

Employment rules that envision redemption for serial killers while condemning petty sexual offenders to a lifetime in exile demonstrate an almost hysterical preoccupation with the latter. I

don't know what secret teenage shame our lawmakers in Lansing are atoning for, but a little rationality in this sphere is long overdue.

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Child Stable After Alleged Abuse

By Anu Prakash

Web produced by Sarah Morgan

January 23, 2006

A 3-year-old was in stable condition after he was taken to the hospital on Sunday when someone called to report a possible case of child abuse.

Investigators from the Wayne County Sheriff's Department were called to an apartment building located on Woodward in Highland Park around 4:30.

According to investigators, the 3-year-old boy was beaten so badly his head swelled to the size of an 11-year-old child's head. Sergeant Larry Crider said, "Our officers received a call to respond to this apartment building near Woodward and Avalon. They responded with medical and ambulance. They checked out the child. Medic one said the child needed to go to the hospital. At the hospital, the doctor did an examination and the examination revealed alleged child abuse. Based on that information our officers did take the mother and the mother's boyfriend into custody." Charges have yet to be filed against either adult.

Father charged with killing son faces court testimony

The Monroe Evening News

1-14-06

BY RAY KISONAS

rayk@monroenews.com

Two-month-old Andrew Nowak suffered 15 broken ribs that could be caused only by extreme pressure such as squeezing, a coroner testified Friday in a Monroe Court.

The Dundee baby died in November of multiple injuries and his father, Keith Nowak, is accused of causing the death.

Dr. Diane Scala-Barnett of the Lucas County (Ohio) Coroner's Office testified in First District Judge Terrence Bronson's courtroom.

Dr. Scala-Barnett said she has been a coroner for 20 years and has performed thousands of autopsies with many of them being infants. But she testified that she never before saw injuries such as those inflicted on Andrew.

"You have to have extreme force to cause such extensive injuries," Dr. Scala-Barnett said. "These are not just rib fractures; they are displaced."

The hearing on Friday

was a preliminary examination, during which a judge must determine if a crime had been committed and if there is substantial evidence against the accused to order him to stand trial in circuit court.

After 2½ hours of testimony, Judge Bronson adjourned the hearing until Feb. 2.

On Friday, Monroe County Assistant Prosecutor Allison Arnold called two witnesses: Dr. Scala-Barnett and Misty Ripple, the baby's mother and the defendant's girlfriend.

Mr. Nowak, 30, sat shackled in court in his jail uniform. He is being represented by Temperance attorney Russell A. Smith.

Ms. Ripple took the stand and began to cry when discussing her children. Across the courtroom, Mr. Nowak also became emotional.

Ms. Ripple testified that in the early morning hours of Nov. 26 she went to bed and Mr. Nowak stayed up with the baby, who was suffering from congestion. She said Mr. Nowak offered to stay up to clean their Tecumseh St. apartment and to take care of the baby.

Ms. Ripple testified that she took the baby to the hospital a week before because he was suffering from what appeared to be symptoms of a chest cold. On the night of the 26th, the baby was restless.

"He was just really fussy," Ms. Ripple said in court. "Fussier than normal."

She said she awoke around 8 or 8:30 a.m. and the baby already had turned blue. While she frantically called 911, Mr. Nowak was tapping on the baby's back thinking the infant was choking. He and Ms. Ripple's mother took turns performing CPR.

"Did you ever see Keith do anything inappropriate to your baby," Mr. Smith asked Ms. Ripple while she was on the stand.

"No." she answered.

"Did you ever see Keith harm that child?"

"No," she repeated.

But Monroe County sher-

iff's detectives and prosecutors believe Mr. Nowak became frustrated at the baby's crying and squeezed it. Dr. Scala-Barnett also testified that the baby's right femur sustained a spiral fracture, meaning that it had been twisted.

The deputy coroner added that the baby had high levels of cough syrup in his system. Dr. Scala-Barnett said although the infant was considered overdosed on the medicine, it would not have been fatal.

It was the severe injuries that eventually led to the baby's death, she said. And, she testified, CPR could not have caused the injuries. "It takes extreme force because a baby's ribs are very elastic," Dr. Scala-Barnett said. "These are all inflicted injuries. We're talking about extreme force to break 15 ribs."

Ms. Arnold is expected to call several more witnesses when the hearing continues in three weeks. Mr. Nowak continues to be held in the Monroe County jail on a \$1 million bond.

Fixing Children's Services

In a city that has seen child abuse fatalities before, the death of Nixzmary Brown, just 7 years old, was a particularly horrifying one. She endured what may have been months of torture and starvation while in the care of her stepfather and mother, finally succumbing after a beating that police said was prompted by a missing container of yogurt. What raised the level of outrage was the disclosure that city workers inexplicably ignored or bungled opportunities to save her.

It's reassuring that Mayor Michael Bloomberg acknowledged the city's failures, and that child welfare workers and supervisors involved in the case have been suspended or reassigned. Some may lose their jobs. A larger investigation will take place and thousands of cases are being reviewed. The self-examination, though, cannot stop there.

Within about two months of Nixzmary's death, three other children, also known to New York's department of child welfare, died in the care of their parents. All four lived in Brooklyn. Three — including Nixzmary — were handled by the Administration for Children's Services office in Bedford-Stuyvesant. One toddler drowned in a bathtub while his mother listened to music in the next room. Police say another child was fatally beaten by her father, and in another case a baby was reportedly squeezed until his ribs broke. It all recalls a time a decade ago when Elisa Izquierdo, a 6-year-old who had been repeatedly abused, was killed by her mother, and the city, in response to the outcry, created Children's Services.

The public is always rightfully enraged when one of these awful deaths occurs because the government was indifferent to the needs of its most fragile citizens. But perhaps it is even worse — certainly it is more frustrating — when the city seems to have been trying hard to meet its obligations. Since the death of Elisa Izquierdo, New York has devoted an increasing amount of attention and money to protecting children at risk. The Bloomberg administration — which has shielded Children's Services from budget cuts it demanded from other city agencies last fall — says that caseworkers are not overburdened. Each handles a load of fewer than 12 cases at a time, the city says, well below a national standard of about 15.

Some employees at Children's Services point to the city's very strong policy of trying to keep even very troubled families intact as a source of tension. The idea that even parents who are potential abusers may be allowed to keep their children is troubling, except to those who remember the many ruined lives that emerged from the foster care system back when city workers were urged to remove children from any doubtful home. Perhaps the balance needs to be readjusted, but there are no perfect solutions when it comes to this kind of choice.

However hard New York has tried, the very fact that City Hall has announced it will be hiring 525 additional child-protection workers suggests more can be done. And while Children's Services was progressing, the improvement seemed to bypass the office in Bedford-Stuyvesant. That is an old story: a troubled corner of an agency with a high-stress mission, a place where bad workers are dumped while most good employees flee as soon as possible. And the last chapter is almost always a terrible one.

Deb Price
The Detroit News

Protect kids by opening statute of limitations

Their fathers sexually abused them. Their families covered it up, warned them not to tell and made them feel dirty, even to blame for what had happened.

As the four middle-aged women told state Rep. Paul Condino, D-Southfield, well into adulthood they continued to feel horrible about themselves and angry that their abusers had never been punished.

"I'm a fairly strong guy, and I had tears in my eyes," Condino recalls of the breakfast meeting a year ago that prompted him to introduce legislation to change Michigan's statute of limitations on civil lawsuits: Currently, abuse victims must sue by age 19. Condino would allow those of any age to sue during a two-year "window" after the bill's passage. After that, victims could sue until age 38.

"I don't know how anyone could listen to those kinds of stories and think that the current system in working," the lawmaker says.

Unfortunately, the Catholic Church doesn't want people to listen to those kinds of stories, some of which would focus yet more attention on abuse by priests. The primary opposition to Condino's much-needed legislative remedy is coming from the Catholic Church. A statement by the Archdiocese of Detroit claims that the current limits on suits by abuse victims have "served our society well in protecting the rights of everyone."

"The Catholic Church's primary concern appears to be how much it might cost them and what further bad PR they'd get, rather than the good that could come for the victims who would finally get a chance to tell what happened to them and have their community say, 'That was wrong,' "says Condino, who was raised Catholic.

So far, only California has opened a child-abuse lawsuit "window" to help victims mend emotionally and to provide some justice even after criminal prosecution is no longer possible. Many victims are in their 30s before they can face what they suffered as kids.

Beyond Michigan, "window" bills are pending in Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania and Colorado. These proposals got a huge boost on Jan. 11 by Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's courageous revelation that as a teen he was molested by a Catholic priest.

"It might seem easier to keep the evils hidden," Gumbleton said in a statement to the Ohio House Judiciary Committee, "to move on and trust that the future will be better. But I am convinced that a settlement of every case by our court system is the only way to protect children and to heal the brokenness within the church."

"Window" bills are an important first step toward protecting future generations. Law professor Marci Hamilton of Yeshiva University, an expert on the clergy sex abuse scandal, rightly urges states to abolish statute of limitations for prosecution of child abuse, as has been done by Maine, Alaska and the federal government.

Working with victims' groups, Hamilton has also drafted the Violence Against Children Act, which -- if passed by Congress -- would link certain federal funds to the abolition of state statutes of limitations on prosecuting sex crimes against children and to opening civil suit "windows" for victims.

One of the most powerful parts of this proposed federal legislation is that it would take away the tax-exempt status of any group that fails to report child abuse or covers it up. Child abusers are rarely rehabilitated. They depend on the silence of powerless children and the indifference of adults. We can change that by demanding that lawmakers enact commonsense legal reforms to protect kids.

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Judge blocks visits by slaying suspect's children

Saturday, January 21, 2006

By John S. Hausman MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A 42-year-old Muskegon man, facing trial in the murder of his longtime live-in girlfriend, has lost visitation rights to the victim's three children -- believed to be his also -- after some of his relatives reportedly brought them to visit him in jail.

Muskegon County Circuit Judge William C. Marietti made the ruling after a hearing Friday in the neglect-and-abuse cases of the children of Brenda Michelle Orton and Bruce Ray Uhl. Their ages range from 10 to 16.

Uhl is charged with open murder and a felony firearm count in Orton's Nov. 11 death. His criminal case is scheduled for a pretrial conference Jan. 30 before Marietti. He is lodged in the Muskegon County Jail in lieu of \$500,000 cash or surety bond.

He is accused of shooting the 36-year-old woman in the head in their home at 1137 E. Forest while all three children were in the house. The homicide apparently stemmed from an argument, police said, and Orton was shot "multiple times," including at least once in the head. She was found on the kitchen floor and was pronounced dead shortly after police received the call at 9:04 p.m.

The state **Department of Human Services**, which has oversight of the children, petitioned Marietti to suspend Uhl's parental rights and to bar contact from any of their relatives except the maternal cousin with whom they are now living.

DHS worker Minnette Gamble told Marietti the agency and the children's caregiver have been deluged with phone calls by family members from both sides, seeking information about the case and trying to talk to the children.

At least once, Gamble said, a caller misrepresented her identity -- claiming to be a sister of Orton, who had no sister. Another time, she said, relatives of the accused killer brought the children to the jail to visit him.

The judge didn't grant the request to stop all relatives' contact with the children, after their court-appointed legal representative David Kortering said that's not the children's wish. But Marietti did direct Kortering and the DHS to discuss with the children which relatives they want to have contact with, and to prepare an approved list based on that.

"These kids have been through some horrific trauma here, and we have a responsibility to make them as comfortable as we can under these stressful circumstances," Marietti said.

The judge also ordered that the children's paternity be definitely determined, either through affidavits of paternity on file with the state or through DNA testing if necessary, because Uhl and Orton never married. After that's done, and after the criminal case is concluded, the DHS is expected to petition the judge for permanent termination of Uhl's parental rights.

Looking out for children

Saturday, January 21, 2006

Grand Rapids Press

The latest report on Michigan's children is a mix of good and bad news. Teen births and dropout rates are down and fewer kids are living in poverty, but abuse and neglect are up. Nearly 30,000 Michigan children were abused or neglected in 2004 -- 1,900 in Kent County and 340 in Ottawa County. That so many children were victims is horrible. But there is a silver lining in the dark cloud of those child abuse numbers. More people are reporting suspected abuse. It indicates that the public is increasingly looking out for the welfare of children, not looking the other way. That is encouraging.

The Kids Count in Michigan report found that in 2004, confirmed cases of child mistreatment were up about 40 percent since 1995 when there were 21,000 cases. More children were being mistreated, but the public was not turning a blind eye to the problem. The number of abuse and neglect complaints received by the Department of Human Services soared from 121,000 in 1995 to 135,700 in 2004.

State officials are receiving more complaints, investigating more cases and removing more children from homes where

their health and safety are at risk. In 2004, the state investigated 76,694 abuse and neglect allegations -- 18,000 more than in 1995; 7,000 more than five years ago.

The Kids Count report was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Skillman Foundation, the Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation, and local United Ways. The data can help local, county and state officials decide where and how to use resources to keep children safe. Research shows that every dollar spent on prevention saves the state \$20 in crisis management. Child abuse prevention is everybody's business. Children suffering cruelties in their homes or elsewhere must get the help they need to escape such conditions. The public must continue to be alert for abuse and be willing to speak up. DHS workers have to do the protecting from there. The idea isn't to be overly intrusive or to break up families; it is to get children out of bad situations. That seems to be happening.

Protesters put the heat on Consumers

Friday, January 20, 2006

By Keith Roberts kroberts@citpat.com -- 768-4922

Two buses of activists from Lansing protested high heating bills Thursday at Consumers Energy's headquarters.

About 50 members of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, an organization of low- to moderate-income families, posted fliers, carried signs and chanted slogans like "Who are we? ACORN. What do we want? Justice."

Camped out in the company's main hall, the group had hoped to meet with Consumers CEO David Joos. They didn't, but after a half hour of demonstrating they learned Consumers officials had agreed to meet with them Tuesday in Lansing and their chants turned to cheers.

"Hopefully, they will listen to some of our concerns," said Laurie Morrow, an ACORN member who said her heat would have been shut off if someone hadn't made a donation to cover her bill. "I would like us to have some input."

David Mengebier, senior vice president of governmental and public affairs for Consumers, spoke with ACORN leaders and shook hands with them afterward.

"We share the concern they have about our customers," Mengebier said. "We definitely care about the issue, too."

Mengebier said the company has increased its energy assistance program with the Michigan Salvation Army to \$2.5 million, supported the Michigan Public Service Commission's recent decision to provide \$27 million in energy assistance to low-income customers and partnered with the commission and Gov. Jennifer Granholm on an energy conservation initiative earlier this week.

"The company doesn't want to be in a position to cut off anybody," Mengebier said.

-- Peter Luke with the Citizen Patriot's Lansing Bureau contributed to this article.

Governor Establishes Mentoring Council

Today, Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** signed an executive order establishing a 15-member Mentor Michigan Leadership Council to support and promote mentoring efforts in the state and educate residents on the benefits gained for everyone involved in mentoring.

"It is important that every child in Michigan has someone to encourage them to live up to their potential and help them achieve their goals," Granholm said. "Mentoring is one critical way we can reach that goal. I encourage citizens throughout the state to become mentors and discover the difference they can make in the life of a child."

Established by Executive Order 2006-3, the Mentor Michigan Leadership Council is charged with identifying existing mentoring activities and encouraging additional activities throughout Michigan; educating Michigan citizens about the importance of mentoring; identifying and promoting standards for mentoring programs; and advocating on behalf of mentors, mentoring organizations, and the expansion of mentoring in Michigan.

Senate Majority Spokesman Ari <u>ADLER</u> said he wondered why the governor was creating new councils to make appointments to when the governor's office has an appointment backlog of 437 vacancies. That number is up the from the 329 vacancies *MIRS* reported 15 months ago (See "<u>Guv At Least 329 Appointments Behind</u>," 10/7/04).

Granholm Press Secretary Liz **BOYD** said she was not in a position to verify or refute Adler's claim given the lateness of the reporter's call. However, she didn't seem too flustered by the information.

"We know it's a new year when Ari Adler is counting the vacancies because he does this every year," she said.

The council will also advise the Governor and the Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC) on the development and implementation of Mentor Michigan, a statewide mentoring initiative to raise awareness about the need for mentors and the benefits associated with mentoring.

First Gentleman Daniel **MULHERN** heads the initiative that was created by Granholm when she served as Attorney General. The Mentor Michigan Leadership Council will be part of the MCSC and will be comprised of 15 members appointed by the Governor.

Appointees are:

- Waite (Kip) S. **BOHNE** of Holt, marketing and promotion manager for WSYM TV FOX 47, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2007.
- Joseph P. **CRAWFORD** of Grand Rapids, editorial page editor for the *Grand Rapids Press*, is appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2007.
- James J. DREYER, of Byron Center, president of Event Marketing Enterprises, Inc, appointed for a

term expiring September 30, 2007.

- Michael D. **FEZZEY** of Farmington, president and general manager of WJR Radio, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2006.
- Randolph K. **FLECHSIG** of Ada, president of Davenport University, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2008.
- Linda **GILLUM** of Bloomfield Hills, senior research fellow with the Executive Leadership Council Institute for Leadership Development and Research, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2008.
- Joyce V. **HAYES-GILES** of Detroit, senior vice president of customer service for DTE Energy, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2007.
- Smallwood **HOLOMAN** of Midland, manager of Dow Promise with Dow Chemical Company, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2006.
- Denise **ILLITCH** of Bingham Farms, president of Illitch Enterprises, Inc, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2009.
- Harry J. **KNOPKE** of Grand Rapids, president of Aquinas College, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2007.
- John S. **LORE** of Bay City, senior vice president of Detroit Medical Center, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2006.
- Daniel J. **PIEPSZOWSKI** of Detroit, vice president of programs for New Detroit, Inc., appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2009.
- Patricia A. **RYAN O'DAY** of Marquette, president and owner of Marquette Monthly, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2008.
- Geneva J. **WILLIAMS** of Detroit, president and CEO of City Connect Detroit, appointed for a term expiring September 30, 2006.

These appointments are not subject to disapproval.

Granholm declared January Mentoring Month and is calling on people around the state to step forward and mentor children in their community. The Governor's proclamation coincides with the observance of National Mentoring Month in January.

Kicked out

Flint sends kids packing at 'epidemic' levels. Is this what we want? FLINT
THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITIONS unday, January 22, 2006
By Matt Bachmbach@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6330
First of two parts

FLINT - Kendrell Pugh was kicked out of school for calling his principal "dawg."

And for wearing a coat in class. And for being in the bathroom at class time. And for hitting an assistant principal. And more.

In all, he's been suspended 55 times in five years - 10 times last year and four times this year before he temporarily dropped out of Northern High School in frustration. He's now 16 and father to a 41/2-month-old boy - conceived, he believes, during one of last year's suspensions.

Saying Kendrell isn't alone would be a severe understatement. Flint had 19,310 students last year and 20,189 suspensions. That's 105 suspensions for every 100 students. It's two to three times as many suspensions recorded in similar districts such as Saginaw, Pontiac, Grand Rapids and Lansing.

Locally, only one district - much smaller Westwood Heights - experienced the same or more suspensions per student average than Flint in recent years. No one else came close.

The reasons are wide-ranging. Educators cite emotional problems of students, lack of parent support and the breakdown of the family - all tied to poverty.

Others, particularly parents and students, blame teachers and administrators who they say don't care and would rather kick a child out than take the time to learn why a problem is occurring.

Whatever the reason, new Flint Superintendent Walter Milton Jr. is so concerned that he's considering a moratorium on certain types of suspensions.

"We cannot function with the number of suspensions at this alarming rate," Milton said. "It's a serious concern to me when a child is not in school because there's a higher probability that they will participate in some kind of activity not conducive to their growth."

But district leaders so far do not have a plan, and meanwhile, Kendrell speaks of a cycle of frustration and disappointment.

"Every time I went to school, I felt there was something petty they were riding my back on or kicking me out for," he said. "I ain't been back to school because I (don't) want to go back. But school is a big issue for me. I love school. But I don't want to go somewhere where I feel like I'm not wanted."

Solution or problem?

Kendrell's example is typical: Suspensions leave students home alone or on the streets unsupervised, doing things they shouldn't be doing.

Suspensions also are tied to the district's high dropout rate. The district sees about 2,000 ninth-graders a year enter its doors, but only about 800 seniors graduate four years later. Some transfer, move out of the area, must repeat a grade, disappear or drop out.

Kids on suspension fall behind, get frustrated and quit, said Leslie Harrington, executive director of the Ann Arbor-based Student Advocacy Center.

"It's the best-kept secret in this state: how many kids are dropping out and being suspended," said Harrington, whose nonprofit organization helps students and parents having problems with schools throughout the state. She called suspensions a step down the path to prisons and homeless shelters. "The suspension problem is really an epidemic."

But the classroom problems that lead to suspensions are real, teachers say, and if they kick a student out, then they can focus on educating the kids not causing trouble.

"Mostly, the suspensions are kids not wanting to listen and not wanting to follow directions," said longtime Northern teacher Mike Personett. "If they are not listening and doing what they are supposed to do then, in my judgment, it takes away from the rest of the group. Then, the only choice is to get them out of class." Taking stock

Administrators are quick to point out that most Flint students don't get suspended.

Last year, 6,671 students (35 percent) were suspended at least once. This means more than 13,500 were never shown the door.

The problem is that those 6,000-plus students are getting kicked out multiple times, said Larry Watkins, director of pupil personnel services for the district.

About 20 percent of those suspended were kicked out 10 or more times. Eleven students were suspended 20 times.

"The number of suspensions is ridiculous because most of it is peer pressure and people trying to be things that they're not," said Flint Southwestern Academy 11th-grader Anthony Kelly, 16, one of the many students who has never been kicked out. "I just try to stay away from the negative things. I try to stay focused on my education, because it's very important."

Watkins likely wishes he saw more students with Anthony's views.

"When you look at the raw numbers, it does not make us look good," Watkins said. "A lot of our students are coming to school with a lot of baggage and we need to look at alternatives to suspension."

Alternatives like in-school suspension, peer mediation, elementary counseling and time-out rooms, to name a few are possible options for Flint. A new \$8-million grant received by the district should help it start or add suspension-alternative programs, Watkins said.

Watkins insists that having a student like Kendrell suspended 55 times shows the district is willing to work with kids: Other districts, he said, would have expelled him after so many suspensions.

"If he's still in the system, he still can be successful," Watkins said. "He can still graduate."

Part of the problem, Watkins said, is that the district doesn't regularly track the type of services a student has received over the years, such as counseling. and whether they've been assessed for special-education assistance. The district is looking to change that.

Lacking that knowledge, though, Watkins can't say if the district did all it could for Kendrell.

"I'm always asked that question, 'Is there something more we could've done?' " Watkins said. "I could speculate and say, 'Yeah, maybe,' but I could also say, 'What else could we do?' "

Quest for respect

Kendrell said his late grandfather, James Pugh, was the last man who could tell him what to do. Kendrell's father and mother were never married and separated when Kendrell was 6. Pugh died when Kendrell was 13. About six years ago, Kendrell moved out of the home of his mother, Fatima Halford, to live with his 60-year-old grandmother, Ilene Singleton-Wright, and her husband, Willie C. Wright Jr., off King Avenue on the north side of Flint.

Kendrell moved out of his mother's home because he didn't like her rules, Willie Wright said.

Now, tattooed on Kendrell's left shoulder are the words, "Only God Can Judge Me, R.I.P. James." - a tribute to Pugh and a symbol of Kendrell's beliefs.

"He's a lot like me. I demand respect," Singleton-Wright said of her grandson.

But Kendrell's hunger for respect - from teachers, administrators and anyone else - keeps landing him in trouble. On Nov. 8, his 16th birthday, Kendrell started joking around while watching a video in Personett's economics class.

Personett, frustrated by repeatedly admonishing the class to be quiet, told Kendrell to "shut up."

"I said, 'You can't tell me to shut up,' That's disrespectful," Kendrell said.

Back to school for only two days after a prior suspension, Kendrell got five more days for class disruption for the incident with Personett and another problem the same day in another class.

Kendrell's mother and grandmother said they've tried to help him and correct him when he's wrong. Singleton-Wright said she once turned Kendrell in to the police when he was found in a stolen vehicle. At age 13, he served 9 months in juvenile detention for the incident.

But they also back up Kendrell's belief that at least half of his suspensions were unwarranted. In November, Halford encouraged her son to leave Northern. He dropped out in December.

"If Kendrell is wrong, he's wrong and whatever happens should happen," Halford said. "But I don't want him back in Northern. He can't go to that school without being harassed by the so-called leaders - the administrators."

Judging results

Schools of Choice administrator Anthony Burton said many attempts were made to help Kendrell at the alternative high school in 2004. Burton met and called Kendrell's family, particularly his mother, frequently. Burton said Kendrell is a smart kid, but they couldn't get him beyond his attitude problems. Burton wanted Kendrell to get assessed to see if his drastic mood changes would qualify him for special-education services, but it never happened.

Kendrell said he didn't want any special-education help.

"He would go along with the program for a while, and then he'd just lose control of himself and get very frustrated and refused to do things," Burton said. "When he'd get like that, you just couldn't deal with him." Still, it doesn't quite add up for Genesee Circuit Judge Duncan Beagle

Beagle, head of the county's Family Court division, has worked with area school districts in recent years to get truant students off the streets. He and other judges met with school officials a couple of years ago and voiced their concerns about suspensions.

"We told the district 'we don't understand why you are suspending kids with behavioral problems,' "Beagle said. "We feel they are only playing into the kids' hands. ... By kicking them out, you are only taking away the help to the kids who need it the most."

Dan Losen, senior education law policy associate with the Harvard Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, has studied the discipline of students, particularly black students, and said he believes suspension doesn't stop bad behavior.

If it worked, Losen said, then a district would see its suspension numbers decline as students move through the grade levels. In Flint, suspension numbers rise from kindergarten on and peak in the seventh and ninth grades - transition years from elementary to middle and middle to high schools.

Losen said Flint's 207 suspensions of kindergartners last year is especially alarming.

"That reflects this overzealous, zero-tolerance policy and misguided belief that, if you get tough on kids, you'll scare them into behaving correctly rather than trying to understand why this kid is misbehaving," Losen said. Flint Journal research found that Flint turns to suspension far more often than similar-sized urban districts in the state.

The Grand Rapids School District had 4,000 more students than Flint last year, but 12,000 fewer suspensions. Milton and Flint Board of Education members say they are most concerned about suspensions for certain types of nonviolent conduct, such as being late to class.

They see suspension numbers rising in the past three years even while enrollment has dropped. Flint's student count since 2002-03 has been declining by an average of 775 students a year, but it's been averaging an increase of 2,300 suspensions a year in that same time period.

Milton is hoping a long-awaited strategic plan will address the issue and many others facing the district. His goal is to complete the plan by June 30.

Kendrell's last chance

Kendrell admits he's no angel and agrees that many of his suspensions could have been avoided if he had he just done as he was told.

But the birth of Kendrell Jr. on Aug. 30 has changed his life, he said, even though his reputation as a troublemaker remains. Kendrell Jr. lives with his 18-year-old mother, but Kendrell tries to see his son daily. He's a doting dad and is happy to do everything from get his son medicine to change his diaper. Kendrell recently broke up with his "baby's mama" and is now dating a 20-year-old woman.

It's the future of his son that drives him to want to finish school and start a career as an audio engineer, mixing sound and running music systems for a church or radio station.

Next week, he'll start at Mott Adult High School. It'll be his fourth high school in three years. He's still a freshman.

"It's my last chance," Kendrell said. "Without a GED or diploma, there's nothing. I've heard at (Mott Adult) they know how to talk to Flint kids. That's my problem: me wanting respect and teachers talking to me in certain way.

"I just want to get in somebody's school. I know I can make it. I don't think, I know I can make it."

QUICK TAKE

Suspended 55 times

Since January 2001, Kendrell Pugh has been suspended 55 times for reasons including the following: INSUBORDINATION: 11 SUSPENSIONS FOR AT

LEAST 38 DAYS

DISRESPECT: 11 FOR AT LEAST 40 DAYS

NO REASON LISTED: Nine for unknown number of days.

CONTINUED DISRUPTION: EIGHT FOR AT LEAST EIGHT DAYS

FIGHTING: FIVE FOR AT LEAST 46 DAYS

TRUANCY AND TARDINESS: THREE FOR AT LEAST EIGHT DAYS

ASSAULT ON ANOTHER STUDENT: THREE FOR 18 DAYS

LOITERING: TWO FOR FIVE DAYS OBSCENITY: ONE FOR THREE DAYS

REPEATED VIOLATIONS OF SCHOOL RULES: ONE FOR THREE DAYS

INCITING OTHERS TO VIOLENCE OR DISOBEDIENCE: ONE FOR THREE DAYS

Source: Kendrell Pugh's school discipline records, provided by his family

On the rise

Flint's enrollment for the last three years has decreased, but its suspension numbers have gone up by an average of 2,300 suspensions a year

By the numbers

Here's a look at some statistics regarding Flint School District's high suspension rate. All numbers are from the 2004-05 school year:

20,189 Total suspensions in Flint schools last year

11,418 Black males suspended

6,671 Students suspended at least once

6,254 Black females suspended

4,810 Ninth-grade student suspensions (highest among all grades)

1,514 White males suspended

668 White females suspended

342 Students suspended more than 10 times

207 Kindergartners suspended

11 Students suspended 20 times in a single school year

2 Preschoolers suspended

Source: Flint School District records

Top ten

Here's a look at the top 10 reasons Flint students were suspended last year:

1 Continued disruption 3,769

2 Insubordination 3,448

3 Fighting 2,951

4 Loitering 2,062

5 Disrespect 1,948

6 Truancy and tardiness 982

7 Snap suspensions* 822

8 Repeated violations of student rules 756

9 Obscenity 575

10 Physical assault on a student 554

Other reasons

Sexual harassment 104

Gambling 69

Look-alike weapons 30

Possession or use of a weapon, other than gun 28

Cigarettes 8

Arson, fireworks, explosives 8

Possession or use of gun 2

On the rise

Here's a look at suspension numbers by Flint high and middle schools in the last three years:

School 2002-03 suspensions 2003-04 suspensions 2004-05 suspensions

Flint School District 15,515 16,809 20,189

Central High 1,794 2,396 3,129

Northern High 1,826 1,896 2,507

Northwestern High 376 350 358

Southwestern High 308 538 508

Schools of Choice High 592 721 957

Holmes Middle 1,515 1,382 1,426

Lowell/Johnson 801 587 657

Longfellow Middle 1,911 1,464 2,299

McKinley Middle 1,272 851 1,015

Whittier Middle 1,459 732 813

Northwestern Middle 1,089 525 365

Southwestern Middle 189 457 655

Source: Flint School District

By the numbers

Here's a look at some statistics regarding Flint School

District's high suspension rate. All numbers are from the 2004-

05 school year:

Genesee County

Atherton 36

Beecher** 33

Bendle 34

Bentley 2

Carman-Ainsworth 38

Clio 16

Davison 21

Genesee*** 39

Goodrich* 3

Grand Blanc* 18

Fenton* 11

Flint 105

Flushing* 8

Kearsley* 27

Lake Fenton 17

LakeVille** NA

Linden* 11

Montrose 7

Mt. Morris** NA

Swartz Creek 21

Westwood Heights* 101

Shiawassee County

Byron less than 1

Corunna less than 1

Durand* 37

New Lothrop 8

Owosso 36

Lapeer County

Almont 10

Dryden 17

Imlay City* 11

Lapeer 13

North Branch* 9

Public charter schools

Academy of Flint**** NA

Burton Glen**** NA

Center Academy 64

Chatfield Academy 2

Grand Blanc Academy 23

Holly Academy 7

International Academy 44

Linden Charter Academy**** NA

Madison Academy 2

Northridge Academy** NA

Richfield Public School Academy 13

Woodland Park Academy** NA

Oakland County

Holly 12

Districts comparable to Flint

Detroit**** NA

Grand Rapids 34

Lansing 46

Pontiac 42

Saginaw 61

Flint 105

About the series

In spending two months researching student suspensions in the area and around Michigan, The Flint Journal tried to compare apples to apples - a challenge because records on suspensions are not uniform from district to district.

Some districts have detailed records showing not only out-of-school suspensions, but also in-school suspensions, detentions and referrals to the principal's office. Some districts break down information by grade level, race and how many times individual students were suspended. Other districts had no data for certain years.

When the numbers were possible to distinguish, The Journal did not include districts' inschool suspensions, on the assumption that students serving in-school suspensions were still being supervised and receiving some type of education.

All information was obtained from school districts through the state's Freedom of Information Act.

Three area public charter schools - Academy of Flint, Linden Charter Academy and Burton Glen - did not respond to the FOIA request, in violation of state law.

Raising minimum wage won't solve very much

Economic problems need wider measures

Ann Arbor News

Sunday, January 22, 2006

The so-called living wage issue is sure to get more attention in the coming months. In Michigan, several groups - including the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice, based in Ann Arbor - are collecting signatures on a petition that would put a proposal on the November ballot. That measure would bump up the minimum wage in this state from \$5.15 to \$6.85 per hour - a 33 percent increase.

Several other states have already legislated minimum wages above the federal level, with a high of \$7.25 in Washington.

The underlying problem is serious. Poverty in America is a fundamental embarrassment to our relatively affluent society.

Ten percent of Washtenaw County's population lives in poverty, according to U.S. Census figures. In Livingston County, poverty levels average 3 percent.

Nationwide, 37 million people live in poverty.

Even worse is the struggle of the working poor - people who have full-time jobs that might push them above the official poverty level, but fail to provide enough income to meet even the most basic needs of food and shelter.

But raising the minimum wage, either at the federal level or state by state, is no panacea. It doesn't address health care costs or the availability of services for those who can't afford insurance.

It doesn't address the disparity between corporate pay and wages of average workers.

It doesn't address cost-of-living issues, most notably the often unaffordable housing prices you'll find in markets like Ann Arbor. In fact, it's a particular irony that the city of Ann Arbor has a targeted living wage ordinance while regularly making decisions that drive up the cost of living within its borders.

In a free enterprise system, businesses bear responsibility to their workers and society, as well as to shareholders. And many businesses do pay their hourly workers more than the federal or proposed state minimum wages. It's in their best interests to do so - to find and retain the best people they can.

Beyond that, the discussion about raising our poorest citizens from the despair of poverty requires asking - and finding answers to - much harder questions.

It might make us feel good to raise the minimum wage. But the solution to our national shame - with its complex, multi-layered causes - isn't that simple.

rald-Valladium INSIDE Kids Week .

SATURDAY, January 21, 2006

BENTON TWP.

Detective arrested for alleged PPO violation

By MICHAEL ELIASOHN H-P Staff Writer

BENTON TOWNSHIP — A with another woman.

Detective Sgt. Cathleen Heator, Heator away. County Trial Court and released m the county fail after posting all a jail officer said

a PPO since Dec. 22. It barred her once tried to contact her in perfrom having contact with Karen son. Mikosz of Benton Township.

At a hearing earlier this month, state police detective was arrested. Mikosz testified she and Heator Friday afternoon for allegedly had been romantically involved violating a personal protective for about 1% years, but after sevorder barring her from contact eral incidents between them Mikosz obtained the PPO to keep

Arthur Cotter, Berrien County ∞ it, was arraigned in Berrien chief assistant prosecutor, said Friday that despite the PPO, Heator persistently tried to contact Mikosz by telephone, leaving leator has been the subject of phone messages, and possibly

He said such violations would constitute contempt of court for violating the PPO, which led to her being arrested Friday afternoon by Benton Township police.

Heator's lawyer, Frank Stanley of Grand Rapids, expressed doubt about her violating the PPO. "I'll believe it when I see it," he said in a phone interview.

Stanley suggested that what really happened may have been the reverse of what was alleged. "I know Karen was trying to contact

my client frequently."

Stanley said he talked with there was an indication there was lation hearings. a problem. I thought things were pretty much resolved and it was a dead issue."

Stanley said a friend of Heator called to inform him of the arrest. He was not at the arraignment.

scheduled for 2 p.m. Monday. possible charges.

ed PPOs can receive anything from a stern warning from the Heator before her arrest Friday, judge to jail time. "It is a civil and at that time "we had no idea proceeding," he said of PPO vio-

Heator also could face criminal charges. Benton Township police granted her request so she could investigated an alleged incident involving Heater at Mikosz's home Nov. 21. To avoid possible conflict of interest, that case was the contempt of court charge is cutor Victor Fitz for review and

Stanley, speaking in general, His review is still going on, said people found to have violat. Cotter and Stanley said.

Heator had requested the Jan. 10 hearing so she could ask a judge to remove from the PPO a prohibition against her possessing or owning a finearm. Berrien County Trial Judge John Donahue return to work

She since has returned to work, Stanley said.

A statement from the Michigan The lawyer said a hearing on turned over to Cass County Prose- State Police Friday, said the alleged violation of the PPO by Heator is under investigation and His review is still going on, review and more information may be released next week.

Child support may not be worth it

ear Annie: I am the mother of a 2-year-old girl. The father left three months after she was born, and we had to fend for ourselves.

I am 23 years old, juggling college and working full time to be able to support my daughter. Thank God for my parents, as I live with them to help me get by.

My daughter's father had a drug and alcohol problem that I found out about later in the relationship. I considered taking my ex-boyfriend to court for child support, but after discussing it with a lawyer, I was told my ex may get visitation rights in exchange.

My ex is very abusive. I have scars from him that no one knows hurt me if I told anyone.

What is our legal system coming to? If I ask for child support, my little girl would be going into a dangerous household.

My ex didn't show up at the hospital when she was born, and he denies her as his daughter, but I can guarantee he will demand visitation if he must pay. What do I do? — Concerned Single

Dear Concerned: The legal system assumes that a man who pays child support will want to be



Kathy MITCHELL Marcy Sugar

part of his child's life.

Since no one knows about the abuse, you cannot expect it to be taken into consideration, but it's time you spoke up. Discuss it with your attorney, along with your ex's record of drug and alcohol abuse, and ask if visitation could be under supervision only.

If the answer is "probably not," figure out if you can raise your child on your own by getting help about because he threatened to from your parents until you finish your college education and get a better-paying job.



STATE OF MICHIGAN MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES



LANSING

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Michigan Child Support Program Collects \$1.38 Billion in 2005 for 435,000 Michigan Children

January 23, 2006

LANSING – The Michigan Child Support Program delivered impressive results for families and taxpayers in fiscal year 2005. Michigan child support workers collected and disbursed over \$1.38 billion in child support for 434,967 Michigan children, and the program's cost effectiveness rating increased by 24 percent during the same period.

The program provided \$1.27 billion to Michigan families, \$24 million in medical support to children, and \$90 million to reimburse federal and state governments for public assistance provided to families.

"This year every dollar invested in the child support program put \$6.70 into the hands of families," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the DHS Office of Child Support (OCS). "This represents a 24 percent increase in cost effectiveness over fiscal year 2004. Like all public employees, child support professionals were asked to do more with less and they responded with excellence."

The program's performance qualifies Michigan for federal incentive dollars in every category measured by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. In 2005 Michigan received \$29 million, which was reinvested in Michigan's program by sharing it among the state, friends of the court, and county prosecutors.

"These results are the outcome of Michigan's unique partnership model of program leadership," said Stephen. "With our program partners at the county level, we will continue to work through any challenges in delivering services to families and address issues facing the program."

"We are very proud of the performance of the child support program in 2005," said Marianne Udow, director of the Department of Human Services, "and we certainly hope that Congress will step up and protect funding for this vital program, which is so critical to ensuring family stability and child well-being."

For more information about child support, visit the DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs